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CC:
Subject: HEADS UP: PA Fracking Stories

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

Residents tell EPA Pa. gas drilling poisons water

By MARC LEVY (AP) – 8 hours ago

CANONSBURG, Pa. — People who make a living from a natural gas drilling technique that involves pumping chemical-laced water into the earth and others who believe it has poisoned them or their well water packed into a hotel ballroom in southwestern Pennsylvania on Thursday night to make an impression on federal researchers.

Residents of Hickory, about 15 miles southwest of Pittsburgh, called for intensive study of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, and told a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency panel that their well water turned foul after drilling began nearby in the last few years.

Darrell Smitsky said five of his goats died mysteriously and, even though state regulators told him the water was safe, his own test showed sky-high levels of manganese and iron. When he blamed the drilling company, he said, it responded, "Can you prove it?"

Stephanie Hallowitch said her family's well water is no longer safe to even allow her children to run through the sprinklers.

"I urge the EPA to help my family and other families living near drilling to get answers to their questions," she said. The research, she continued, must be done "to protect other families before it is too late and they are in our situation."

In fracking, drilling crews pump millions of gallons of sand- and chemical-laced water deep into the earth to break up dense rock to free the natural gas. Some of that water returns as a briny, chemical- and metal-laden brew and is usually stored in open pits until it's trucked to treatment plants or underground injection wells.

The oil and gas industry steadfastly defends the fracking process as having been proven safe over many years and says it is a crucial tool if the country is going to be able to harvest its gas reserves. With many speakers calling for a moratorium on fracking or tough federal regulation, industry representatives contended that states are already doing that job.

The EPA has begun a new look at fracking as gas drillers swarm to the lucrative Marcellus Shale region and blast into other shale reserves around the country. The process is currently exempt from federal regulation, and instead states apply their own rules to it.

Shale drilling is being viewed as so lucrative that international exploration companies are investing billions of dollars in the

pursuit.

James Erb, of the American Petroleum Institute, which represents major oil and gas producers, told the EPA that the group is aware of substantial public concern over fracking and that it supports the EPA's review.

API, he said, is confident that the sound application of fracking causes no significant risk to human health, drinking water sources or the environment.

Lou D'Amico, president of the Pennsylvania Independent Oil & Gas Association, made up of hundreds of businesses, said that no example exists of fracking having polluted ground water and that the EPA study should include a review of complaints lodged to state-level agencies and how they were investigated.

"The controversy is one based on media-generated public hysteria and perception, not science, fact or evidence," he said.

Thursday's hearing lasted five hours, with scores of speakers each getting two minutes at a microphone.

Canonsburg is at the heart of hundreds of Marcellus Shale wells that began to be drilled in earnest in 2008. Some geologists say the vast Marcellus Shale region primarily beneath Pennsylvania, New York, West Virginia and Ohio could become the nation's largest natural gas field.

Already, about 1,500 Marcellus Shale wells have been drilled in Pennsylvania in barely two years, and thousands more are expected, transforming areas of the state. Numerous landowners are getting paid to lease their land for drilling or are receiving royalty checks from producing wells. Meanwhile, many industries such as steel pipe makers and haulers are seeing huge new demand from drilling companies.

But many landowners are coming forward to tell stories about spoiled well water.

The EPA's \$1.9 million study is expected to yield preliminary results by the end of 2012, Fred Hauchman, director of the EPA's Office of Science Policy, told attendees at the outset.

Hauchman promised to reach out to experts and study a wide variety of water sources, and he said an advisory board of scientists has told the agency to focus on the impact on water quality and quantity.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Passions on Display at E.P.A. Meeting

If the Environmental Protection Agency had hoped that the hundreds of landowners, students, community activists, environmentalists and oil and gas representatives invited to a hotel ballroom in southwestern Pennsylvania Thursday night would really stay on point, they were surely disappointed.

The aim of the meeting, which drew well over 1,000 attendees, was to solicit advice from stakeholders on how E.P.A. should focus and design a study of the impact of hydraulic fracturing on groundwater.

The agency's regional administrator instructed the crowd at the outset that the meeting was not to become a debate on the merits of the practice, which involves injecting a high-pressure cocktail of water, sand and chemicals deep underground to crack the rock and release natural gas deposits.

Much advice was offered, and E.P.A. scientists and regulators took copious notes. Industry supporters, too, were on hand to urge that science trump emotion in any analysis, and to point out that hydraulic fracturing has never been definitively linked to groundwater contamination.

But the vast majority of the more than 100 speakers used their two-minute turns at the microphone to unleash furious recriminations at the gas industry, hydraulic fracturing and state and federal regulators for negligence in allowing it to continue. One resident called the E.P.A.'s pending analysis the equivalent of studying the flammability of Rome while the city was burning, while others offered a litany of personal experiences with ponds, streams and wells — all contaminated, they believe, by nearby natural gas fracking fluids.

"Corporations have no conscience," said Dencil Backus, a resident of Mount Pleasant Township in Pennsylvania. "E.P.A.

must give them that conscience.”

Hydraulic fracturing has been practiced in Pennsylvania and around the country for decades. The gas industry insists that no clear evidence has ever surfaced linking the fluids they use to crack open gas deposits to contamination of drinking water or any other systemic environmental problems.

The E.P.A.’s study — which is just getting started and is expected to be completed in early 2012 — aims to explore the connection further.

Pennsylvania is among several northeastern states where the natural gas industry is priming for a boom. An industry-sponsored and financed study released this week suggested that the gas play, known as the Marcellus Shale, could generate some \$6 billion in government revenues and create up to 280,000 jobs.

But with oil still washing up on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico, many residents were witheringly skeptical of drillers in general. “If you believe the industry line, it’s all coincidental and it’s not their fault,” Mel Packer, a member of Pennsylvania’s Green Party and a congressional hopeful, said of the dozens of personal stories from landowners complaining of water contamination from nearby gas wells. “I recognize a scam when I hear one.”

Whether the opprobrium is justified or misplaced remains a matter of debate, particularly among those seeking to nudge the nation toward cleaner sources of energy. Many experts consider natural gas, which burns more cleanly than coal or oil, to be a crucial bridging fuel in that process.

“Natural gas has played and will continue to play an important role in our energy portfolio as we transition to a new energy future, and we are fortunate to have domestic resources to help meet our growing needs,” Senator Bob Casey, a Pennsylvania Democrat, said in a prepared statement delivered to the assembly. “But I believe it is important to protect the health and safety of Pennsylvanians as we further develop the Marcellus Shale.”

WEST VIRGINIA PUBLIC RADIO

EPA conducts public meeting on hydraulic fracturing study

By Ben Adducchio

Audio Link: <http://www.wvpubcast.org/newsarticle.aspx?id=15777>

July 23, 2010 – The federal Environmental Protection Agency held a public meeting Thursday in western Pennsylvania to discuss its research on a popular gas and oil extracting process. Under the earth in West Virginia and several other eastern states lies a vast amount of natural gas, trapped in rock.

Freeing that gas is done through a process called hydraulic fracturing.

Fracking, as it is nicknamed, uses millions of gallons of water, mixed with chemicals.

The water is pumped into rock creating fractures that allow the gas to be released and captured. The Environmental Protection Agency is interested in learning more about how this process affects drinking water in communities.

Pennsylvania’s State Director for Clean Water Action, Myron Arnowitt, thinks that’s good news. “There are things that need to be done to protect people from what’s happening, that is very clear,” Arnowitt said.

During the meeting in Canonsburg, Pa., EPA officials spoke with residents about the agency’s study of fracking and its impact on drinking water.

Arnowitt and more than 1,000 others turned out to listen and to speak.

Bob Deiseroth lives in Washington County, Pa., near some gas wells.

“It’s been a great experience; I haven’t had any problems with any environmental concerns or anything,” he said.

According to a recent report for the American Petroleum Institute, drilling into what is known as the Marcellus shale gas

reserves is profitable in West Virginia and Pennsylvania.

The report says the Marcellus reserves are worth at least \$2 trillion to industry and billions in potential tax revenues to states.

Scott Courtney is vice president of Oil and Gas Exploration and Production Services with the SCE Environmental Group.

His job is to work with the oil and gas industry to provide support services like finding water for the fracking process.

He's also involved in soil and groundwater testing.

"I firmly believe that the rules and regulations that are in place are protective of human health and the environment," Courtney said.

"I like to fish in these rivers, I like to take my kids in the river, I like to drink clean water," he said, "I like to think that we're contributing to developing the energy resources this country deserves, while maintaining environmental integrity."

But Peter Wray doesn't think there are enough regulations.

He lives in Pittsburgh and is co-chair of the conservation committee of the Allegheny Group, Sierra Club.

"The possible contamination of drinking water is a major question. We cannot simply rely upon the assurances from the industry and state agencies that there is no possibility of contamination," he said.

"What the public needs is a comprehensive, scientific study."

The EPA's research will use collected data from previous work and information from new case studies. The preliminary results are expected by late 2012.

In West Virginia, interest in gas well drilling has increased in recent years. Last month, an explosion at a gas well operation in Marshall County left seven workers injured.

The West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection ordered the company with the permit to operate there to stop all of its state operations.

The DEP reviewed the company's work and yesterday allowed AB Resources PA LLC of Ohio, to re-start its operations.

According to the West Virginia DEP, there are more than 500 wells in the state targeting the Marcellus shale formation.

Due to widespread interest in gas drilling, the DEP's Office of Oil and Gas is conducting a comprehensive review of its program.

That review is looking at staffing levels, funding, and agency policies.

WHEELING INTELLIGENCER

Opinions Differ On Safety of Fracking,

EPA panel hears both sides on drilling process

By CASEY JUNKINS

POSTED: July 23, 2010

CANONSBURG, Pa. - If you ask James Erb, Kathryn Klaber or Dave Spigelmyer, they will tell you that hydraulic fracturing into Marcellus Shale is relatively safe - and should remain exempt from federal oversight.

However, many of the roughly 1,200 people assembled at Canonsburg, Pa.'s Hilton Garden Inn on Thursday seemed to disagree. They expressed their views to representatives of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency during a public meeting to collect comments about hydraulic fracturing. Many of the 120-plus speakers cited examples of water contamination, while urging EPA officials to find a way to regulate drilling.

Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, - the action used to break the Marcellus Shale - calls for drills to blast millions of gallons of water, sand and chemicals into the ground. The process is currently exempt from the federal Safe Drinking Water Act, enforced by the EPA.

Erb, speaking on behalf of the American Petroleum Institute a day after that organization released a study showing that Marcellus activity boosted West Virginia's economy by \$1.3 billion last year, said, "Our members have extensive experience in performing this activity."

Klaber, president and executive director of the Marcellus Shale Coalition in Washington, D.C., said her industry is "working tirelessly to ensure that fracking is done effectively, prudently and in a way that continues to create thousands of good-paying jobs."

Speaking outside the actual meeting, Dave Spigelmyer, vice president of government relations for Chesapeake Energy, said state regulators - the West Virginia and Pennsylvania Departments of Environmental Protection - should manage fracking because they know the specific topography and hydrology of their states.

Stephanie Hallowich of Hickory, Pa., however, said her well water was contaminated in June 2009 because of nearby Marcellus drilling. She urged EPA officials to look deeper into the problems.

Pennsylvania resident Darrell Smitsky said his well water turned brown in 2008 after nearby drilling, adding that five of his goats soon died after drinking some of his water.

Paul Heckbert of the Steel Valley Trail Council, urged those just looking at the pots of money offered by drilling companies to consider the larger picture.

"It is hard to feel wealthy if your land gets fouled," he said.

Pennsylvania residents Robert Schmetzer and Ron Gulla said their state's environmental protection department has failed them.

"The (Pennsylvania) DEP has not done their job," Gulla stressed.

"I believe the DEP has been a failure in Pennsylvania," Schmetzer added.

Sporting an anti-drilling T-shirt outside the meeting area, Pittsburgh resident Ken Weir added of the gas companies, "They don't want regulations. ... If you want to drill, do it right."

PITTSBURGH POST GAZETTE

1,200 hear Marcellus Shale debate: EPA hearing in Southpointe one of four nationwide

Friday, July 23, 2010

By Don Hopey, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Concerns about the risk of water contamination and public health problems from Marcellus Shale drilling dominated a sometimes loud U.S. Environmental Protection Agency hearing in Southpointe attended by 1,200 people Thursday night.

Although EPA officials told those in attendance the meeting was not about drilling policy, most of the more than 100 speakers let it be known that they oppose Marcellus Shale drilling in the state, and many shared personal stories of contaminated wells, dead farm animals and damaged health. They attributed the problems to water contamination caused by the deep gas drilling operations that are increasing quickly through much of the state.

Several urged that a moratorium on Marcellus Shale drilling be enacted until the EPA finishes its study scheduled for the end of 2012.

Erica Staff, of PennEnvironment, a statewide environmental group, was joined by many speakers in requesting that the EPA broaden its study of the hydraulic fracturing process, known in the industry as "fracking."

"I urge EPA to expand the scope of the study to include the entire life cycle of gas extraction," Ms. Staff said.

Myron Arnowitt, state director for Clean Water Action, said the EPA needs to look at industry practices that have caused the state Department of Environmental Protection to issue 565 violations at 207 of the 1,458 wells drilled into the Marcellus Shale in Pennsylvania since 2005.

"Eighty of the violations are for illegal disposal of wastewater, and 115 of them were for frack pit violations, and those are serious and need to be investigated by the EPA," Mr. Arnowitt said.

The hearing was the third of four meetings scheduled around the country by the EPA to provide information and gather comments about its proposed \$1.9 million study of the risks to surface and ground water from fracking, a high-pressure, water intensive, procedure used in deep natural gas well drilling to free the gas from dense rock layers a mile or more underground. The EPA held hearings in Fort Worth, Texas, and Denver earlier this month, and next month will hold the last hearing in Binghamton, N.Y.

The drilling technique, used in deep shale and coal beds from Texas to Colorado to Pennsylvania, pumps up to 8 million gallons water and chemical additives -- some of them toxic -- mixed with sand or similar materials down a well under high pressure. The "fracking fluid" causes the shale or coal to crack and the sand props the rock layers apart, allowing the gas trapped there to escape up the well. Some of the contaminated water also returns to the surface and must be collected and disposed of or reused in other wells.

The drilling industry, which emphasizes the economic benefits of tapping into one of the largest unconventional gas fields in the world, says fracking has been used successfully and safely for more than 50 years in many shallow gas wells in Pennsylvania.

"Fracking is neither a new nor controversial process," said Lou D'Amico, president and executive director of the Pennsylvania Independent Oil and Gas Association. "Any controversy is based on hysteria, not facts. It's had no negative impact on groundwater anywhere it's been used."

James Erb, who spoke as a representative of the American Petroleum Institute, said his members know that fracking is a public concern and support the EPA's review of the technology.

"We intend to be active in the study plan developments and its implementation," Mr. Erb said. "We are confident it will show no risk to human health, water resources or the environment."

But environmentalists say the use of fracking in the Marcellus Shale bed that underlies three-fourths of Pennsylvania expands its impact on water supplies and quality.

Terry Greenwood, a Washington County farmer, said he lost 10 calves, eight of them stillborn and another born with a cleft palate, after Marcellus gas wells were drilled near his property.

"My water went bad, but the DEP said it was just farmers' bad luck," he said. "But since I fenced off my pond in 2009, I haven't had any problems. I think clean water is more important than gas."

In its announcement of public hearings for its study in June, the EPA noted that "serious concerns have been raised about hydraulic fracturing's potential impact on drinking water, human health and the environment."

In a statement released Wednesday, the EPA said that while natural gas "plays a key role in our nation's clean energy future and the process known as hydraulic fracturing is one way of accessing that vital resource ... there are serious questions about whether the process of hydraulic fracturing impacts drinking water, human health and the environment and further study is warranted."

The agency said the public hearings are part of the process of launching that study and promised to utilize the best available science and consider public input.

"We see an opportunity, too, for more case studies," said Robert Puls, of the EPA's National Risk Management Laboratory. "We'll also look at vulnerable water resources, both in terms of their distance from a drill site and the intensity of well development. Because of that, the risk could be greater both in terms of water quality and quantity."

As if to emphasize the high stakes of the gas drilling in the Marcellus Shale, industry and environmental groups staged competing news conferences immediately prior to Thursday evening's hearing.

A 2004 EPA review of earlier hydraulic fracturing studies identified health risks associated with some of the lubricating chemicals in the fracking fluid, and noted that the fracturing process could create pathways through which methane can

contaminate drinking water wells, but concluded that it found no link between "fracking" and contamination of drinking water supplies. That review, which was used to exempt hydrologic fracturing from regulation by the EPA under the federal Safe Drinking Water Act, has been widely criticized by scientists and environmental organizations for failing to take into account case studies of existing contamination.

The new EPA fracking study proposal was prompted by last year's introduction of legislation -- H.B. 2766, also known as the "FRAC Act" -- that would remove the hydraulic fracturing exemptions that were granted in 2005. The industry is opposed to EPA regulation of the fracking process and has lobbied against passage of the bill.

Thursday night's hearing capped an active week on the Marcellus Shale issue. On Tuesday, Pittsburgh passed a resolution demanding that the state impose a one-year moratorium -- similar to that already in place in New York -- on drilling into the 450-million-year-old Devonian formation, the hottest natural gas "play," or deposit, in the nation. Wednesday evening a standing-room-only crowd of more than 200 attended an Allegheny County Council hearing that focused on Marcellus well drilling in Allegheny County and its potential impacts on the environment and the health of residents and also its economic benefits.

The Marcellus Shale Coalition issued a statement calling the city's moratorium resolution "unfortunate, unnecessary and, frankly, ill-advised" while citing industry job growth and downplaying environmental risks. PennEnvironment commended the city for recognizing that "the gas drilling industry's track record of spills and violations demonstrates a need for additional rules and laws that protect our rivers, drinking water, open spaces, clean air, and public health."

Also this week, the state Department of Environmental Protection ordered Cabot Oil & Gas Corp. within 60 days to fix permanently the water supplies in 14 homes in Dimock, Susquehanna County, that were contaminated by the company's gas well drilling operations. The DEP said it would lift a ban on reviewing new gas well applications by Cabot after the company permanently plugged three of the wells.

An industry study, released Wednesday and paid for by the American Petroleum Institute, said Marcellus Shale gas production could create 280,000 new jobs region-wide, and add \$6 billion in new tax revenue to local state and federal governments over the next decade. The study, authored by Timothy Considine of Natural Resource Economics, a Wyoming consulting firm that does work for the industry, said about 100,000 of those jobs could be created in Pennsylvania and West Virginia. When he worked for Penn State University, Mr. Considine was also the author of a 2009 report that predicted Marcellus Shale drilling would have a multi-billion dollar impact and create 175,000 jobs in Pennsylvania by 2020. The report was criticized because it did not disclose that it was funded by the Marcellus Shale Coalition, a pro-industry advocacy organization.

The state Environmental Quality Board also held a hearing Thursday night in Pittsburgh on proposed state regulatory changes to improve the safety of oil and gas wells and protect the Pennsylvania's water supplies from contamination. The tighter well construction standards are intended to prevent natural gas from migrating from a well to adjacent, shallow ground water where it contaminate the water supply and cause dangerous concentrations to accumulate in homes and structures.

Because of the conflict with the EPA hearing, the EQB will hold a repeat hearing at 7 p.m. Monday in the state Department of Environmental Protection's Waterfront Conference room A and B, 400 Waterfront Drive, Washington's Landing.